

Kate Darlow Nov 2014

I never imagined that going to a 'Scottish Pelvic Floor Network' meeting on a wet Saturday morning in Glasgow, would lead me to a trip of a life time to Uganda a year later. I listened to Mhairi Collie give a lecture on her experiences of fistula surgery and chatting together afterwards we shared stories of working in Ethiopia; Mhairi as a general surgeon and myself as an Obstetrician and Gynaecologist. During my time in Ethiopia I was able to watch some fistula operations in one of the Hamlin hospitals and was inspired to learn the skills required for this complex surgery.

Joining Mhairi and Brian was one of the most enriching and fulfilling weeks of my career to date. From the moment we arrived I was shown how to assess patients, with the use of plenty of blue dye. Each lady came with a tragic story, all leaking urine, each one different from the last. Yet Brian and Mhairi were confident we could help them. The next morning the operating begun, 8:30 to 6 or 7 each night. Over the course of the week I begun to get to know all the wonderful characters I'd heard so much about -Sebastian the anaesthetist (75 years old with no sign of stopping) and Rose, our ward nurse. Gradually the new ward filled up with patients and Ishbel and her team of nurses were kept busy. Twice a day we made a round of the ward, asking each lady 'Wakalu?' - are you dry? The most important question to us all, but of course most importantly to the women. When it finally came time for us to leave, we were treated to all of the women coming out of the ward for a group photo which was filled with wonderful smiling faces.

I'm looking forward to my trip next year already.

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